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E YOUR OWN

GRAPHIC NOVEL



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by Natalie M. Rosinsky

WRITE YOUR OWN

GRAPHIC NOVEL

by Natalie M. Rosinsky



Compass Point Books  Minneapolis, Minnesota

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About the Author

Natalie M. Rosinsky is the award-winning author of more than 100 works for young readers. She earned graduate degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has been a high school teacher and college professor as well as a corporate trainer. Natalie, who reads and writes in Mankato, Minnesota, says, "My love of reading led me to write. I take pleasure in framing ideas, crafting words, detailing other lives and places. I am delighted to share these joys with young authors in the Write Your Own series of books."

Your writing journey

Graphic novels are a popular way to tell all kinds of stories. In these book-length comics, authors use pictures as well as words to tell their stories. Many writers create their own images, but other writers work with artists to craft these high-interest, exciting tales. Adventures, legends, science fiction, fantasies, and fairy tales are all being written as graphic novels. Nonfiction such as autobiography, history, and science are also part of the entertaining and award-winning world of graphic novels.

You, too, can write your own graphic novel! This book will be your guide as you explore and map out a creative path that is right for you. It will help you keep the big picture in sight as your graphic novel takes shape.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



WANT TO BE A WRITER?

This book is the perfect place to start. It aims to give you the tools to write your own graphic novel. Learn how to craft believable portraits of people and perfect plots with satisfying beginnings, middles, and endings. Examples from famous graphic novels appear throughout, with tips and techniques from published authors to help you on your way.

Get the writing habit

Do timed and regular practice. Real writers learn to write even when they don't particularly feel like it.

Create a graphic novel writing zone.

Keep a journal.

Carry a notebook—record interesting events and note how people behave and speak.

Generate ideas

Find a story you want to tell or retell.

For nonfiction, which topic or person's life will you explore? What problems and accomplishments are associated with this topic or person?

Brainstorm to find out everything about your chosen story, topic, or person.

Research settings, events, and people related to the story, topic, or person's life.

GETTING STARTED

SETTING THE SCENE

CHARACTERS

VIEWPOINT

You can follow your progress by using the bar located on the bottom of each page. The orange color tells you how far along

the graphic novel writing process you have gotten. As the blocks are filled out, your graphic novel will be growing.



Plan

What is your graphic novel about?

What happens? Plan beginning, middle, and end.

Write a synopsis of your graphic novel.

Decide who will illustrate the graphic novel. Will it be you?

Decide on an illustration style and which method of scriptwriting you will use for the novel.

Write

Write and illustrate the first draft, then put it aside for a while.

Check the narrative boxes, dialogue, and art—do they flow?

Remove unnecessary words.

Redo or rearrange illustrations as needed.

Does the graphic novel have a good title and satisfying ending?

Publish

Write or print the final draft.

Always keep a copy for yourself.

Send part of your graphic novel to children's magazines, Internet writing sites, competitions, or school magazines.

Send it to publishers that specialize in graphic novels, publish and distribute it yourself, or publish the novel online.

SYNOPSIS AND PLOTS

WINNING WORDS

SCINTILLATING SPEECH

HINTS AND TIPS

THE NEXT STEP

When you get to the end of the bar, your book is ready to go! You are an author! You now need to decide what to do with your

book and what your next project should be. Perhaps it will be a sequel to this graphic novel, or something completely different.

CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED



YOUR CREATIVE LIFESTYLE

Today's graphic novelists may do research in the library, on the Internet, or at a bookstore. They sometimes travel to interview experts. Or they may go to places key to the events or setting of their book-length comics.

Just like all writers, graphic novelists need handy tools and a safe, comfortable place for their work. A computer can make writing quicker and be a valuable illustrating tool, but it is not essential.

What you need

These materials will help you organize your ideas and your findings:

- small notebook that you carry everywhere
- paper for writing activities
- pencils or pens with different colored ink
- sheets of paper for scriptwriting and illustrating
- files or folders to keep your gathered information organized and safe
- dictionary, thesaurus, and encyclopedia



Find your writing place

Think about where you as a writer feel most comfortable and creative. Perhaps a spot in your bedroom works best for you. Possibly a corner in the public library is better. If your writing place is outside your home, store your writing materials in a take-along bag or backpack.

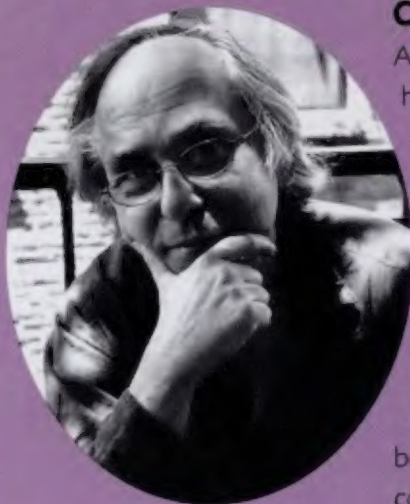
Create a graphic novel writing zone

- Play some of your favorite music or music related to the story or topic of your graphic novel.
- Use earplugs if you write best when it is quiet.
- Decorate your space with pictures of places or people mentioned in your graphic novel or of artwork related to its story or topic.
- Place objects that hold good memories from your own life around your space.



Follow the writer's golden rule

Once you have chosen your writing space, go there regularly and often. It is all right to do other kinds of writing there—such as a diary or letters—as long as you keep on writing!



CASE STUDY

Art Spiegelman (left) wrote and illustrated his family's history, titled *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, as he listened to tapes of his father telling about his life and to recordings of music popular in the 1930s. Jeff Smith also listened to music while he drew *Bone* but needed quiet for writing it. Smith says, "I can't listen to anything while I write." Unlike these graphic novelists, Linda Medley does not work best in a studio. She writes and draws most comfortably when she is in bed!

GET THE WRITING HABIT

Before you can write great graphic novels, you have to build up your writing “muscles.” Just as an athlete lifts weights or a dancer practices footwork, you must train regularly. You cannot wait until you are in the mood or feel inspired.

CASE STUDY

Siena Cherson Siegel worked with her artist husband, Mark Siegel, to create *To Dance*. Siena first tape-recorded, then typed and edited her memories. She and Mark then worked together figuring out what could be illustrated before Siena wrote out a first draft. An editor went through this material before Siena wrote another draft. Then she and Mark worked together on the pictures he drew.

Tips and techniques

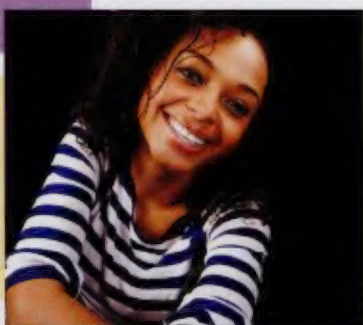
Set a regular amount of time and a schedule for your writing. It could be 10 minutes every morning before breakfast or one hour twice a week after supper. Then stick to your schedule.

Now it's your turn

Live it up!

Perhaps the nearest mirror is a “magic” one that will reveal the subject of your graphic novel—you! Your life story or autobiography could be told as a graphic novel. Marjane Satrapi uses this form for

her autobiography about her girlhood in 1980s Iran, *Persepolis*. Siena Cherson Siegel writes about her lifelong love of ballet in the award-winning autobiography *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel*.



Now it's your turn

The best and worst

Begin your writing practice with some timed brainstorming. Go to your writing place. Close your eyes for a minute and relax. Think about what the phrases “the best day” and “the worst day” bring to mind. Now open your eyes and write down these sentences:

- “The best day in my life was _____ because _____.”
- “The worst day in my life was _____ because _____.”

For the next 15 minutes, complete these sentences with any words that pop into

your head. Scribble away! Let the ideas pour out onto the paper the way water gushes out of a faucet. Now stop. You are on your way to writing your own autobiographical graphic novel!



Tips and techniques

Read three or four graphic novels by various authors to widen your knowledge and appreciation of this form.

CASE STUDY

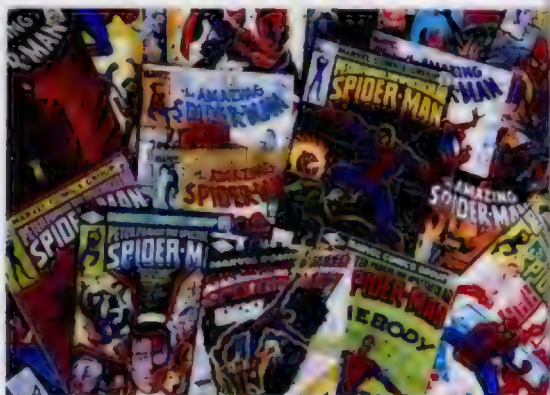
Graphic novelist Marjane Satrapi did not read comics or graphic novels until she was 25 years old. She learned that

“like anything new, you have to cultivate your interest. It’s like in opera. You have to go a couple of times to appreciate it.”

THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Graphic novels first appeared in the 1970s, but they grew out of an older tradition of newspaper comic strips and comic books.

In comics, familiar animals such as Garfield or Opus sometimes have human feelings, problems, and adventures. Some graphic novels also display such characters. In this way, these graphic novels are related to fairy tales, folktales, and myths, which also often feature talking animals and creatures. As you think about what story you want to tell in your graphic novel, consider whether your characters will be human



or just *act* like human beings. While there is a strong tradition of superheroes and villains in comic books, you do not have to create such adventures—unless you want to. The art of storytelling in graphic novels is as wide open as your imagination.

Now it's your turn

Blast from the past!

You may enjoy retelling a well-known story, adding your own special twists, characters, or details. Linda Medley recasts many well-known fairy tale plots and characters, such as Sleeping Beauty and Simple Simon, in her graphic novel *Castle Waiting*. Writer Jeff Limke retells a famous legend in *King Arthur—Excalibur Unsheathed: An English Legend*.

Browse the Internet or visit the library to rediscover some of your favorite fairy tales, legends, myths, and tall tales. You may even find some enchanting or exciting tales that are new to you. Read at least

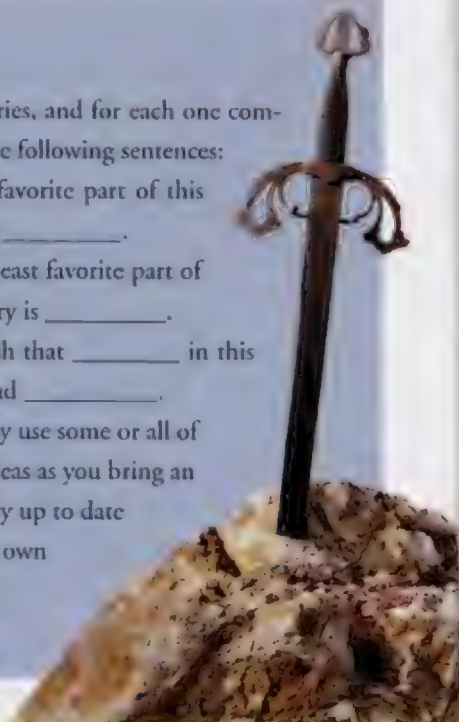
five stories, and for each one complete the following sentences:

My favorite part of this story is _____.

My least favorite part of this story is _____.

I wish that _____ in this story had _____.

You may use some or all of these ideas as you bring an old story up to date in your own graphic novel.



CASE STUDY

As a young man, Craig Thompson (right) missed his friends when he moved from Wisconsin to Oregon. He transformed his feelings of sadness and loss into a graphic novel, *Good-bye, Chunky Rice*. Its fictional main characters are a turtle named Chunky Rice and his best friend, a mouse named Dandel. They miss one another when Chunky Rice bravely sets out to see the world.



Now it's your turn

Wanted: Inspiration

Think about your own life and people you know, to discover the problems, perils, or pleasures that may inspire a fiction graphic novel. Do you enjoy school, or do you find it frustrating? Perhaps a family situation—such as a move, a new baby, or an illness—has been the focus of a recent problem or pleasure you experienced or saw.

Spend 15 minutes brainstorming ideas.

On the top of a sheet of paper, write the words “School,” “Family,” and “Friends.” In each of these three columns, write down as many pleasant events or situations as you can. Draw a line under these. Then list as many problems as come to mind for each of these categories. You may just have found the central situation or emotional center of your own graphic novel.



CASE STUDY

Japanese graphic novels called *manga* are increasingly popular worldwide. Traditionally characters in *manga* are drawn with the wide-open, round eyes of the American comic strip and cartoon characters that first inspired Japanese manga artists. Characters in animated Japanese films called *anime* are also drawn this way.

FIND YOUR VOICE



Every good writer has a style of writing that is unique to that person—his or her own writer's voice. Writers continue to develop their voices throughout their lives.

Skilled writers also learn to change their voices to match different subjects or situations. This is particularly true of writing a graphic novel. Veteran author Avi learned that when he wrote *City of Light, City of Dark: A Comic-Book Novel*. "You can't just read *City of Light, City of Dark*, you have to look at the pictures," he says. Nor can you just look at the pictures—you have to read the book. That was not easy to achieve." Even the font—the style of lettering—that graphic novelists use for different situations may communicate meaning.

The overall "voice" of a graphic novel is a combination of its visual elements with its words. But the writer's words alone still communicate tone. They let readers know whether the material is being treated seriously or humorously.



Tips and techniques

Use thicker, darker letters to indicate angry shouting or a frightened scream. Show the burst of noise from an explosion, lightning, or a thundering roar with bigger lettering than you use for regular description or conversation. The Monster of Lake Lobo (left) by Scott Nickel combines color with large lettering.

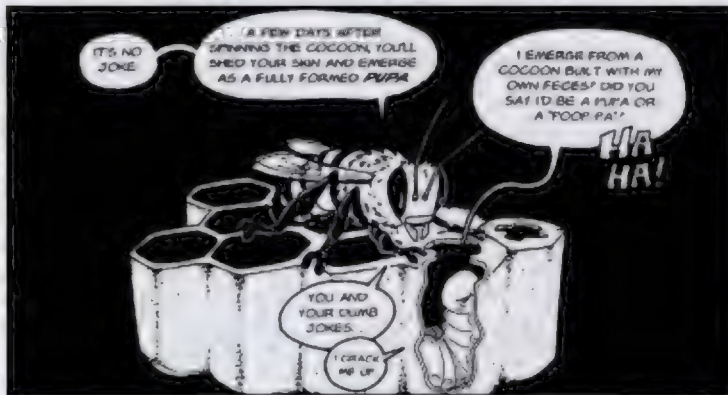
CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED

Writers' voices

See which writer takes a humorous tone toward the subject matter and which author is more serious.

The life cycle of honeybees:

A surprised young bee jokes about her next stage of development in *Clan Apis* by Jay Hosler:



A seriously damaged future:

This opening narration describes a terrible “history” for a future Earth:

Plundering the soil of its riches, fouling the air, and remolding life forms at will, this gargantuan industrial society had already peaked a thousand years after its foundation. Ahead lay abrupt and violent decline. The cities burned, welling up as clouds of poison in the war remembered as the seven days of fire.



Hayao Miyazaki, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*

CASE STUDY

Hayao Miyazaki is also an award-winning director of anime. His films include a version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*.

GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT

Use the library and Internet to gather all the information you need to write your own graphic novel.

Avoid mistakes! If your retold legend is set in ancient Greece, learn what kinds of clothing, tools, and foods people used then. If your family's history includes important historical events such as wars or natural disasters, research what happened then. You might also interview people who lived through these events or experts such as military leaders, engineers, or doctors.

Tips and techniques

Use a tape recorder or take notes during an interview to preserve the information you hear. Not everyone is comfortable being tape-recorded, so be certain to ask about this at the beginning of an interview.



Now it's your turn

The future is now!

Are you concerned about the future of Earth and humanity? Science fiction often focuses on big questions such as global warming, pollution, robots and artificial intelligence, loss of personal privacy, or nuclear war and its aftermath. Japanese manga include many science fiction novels, such as Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Set far in the future, it shows life on a terribly polluted Earth.

Perhaps a science fiction graphic novel is in *your* future. Brainstorm this idea

by spending 15 minutes in your writing place. Select a "big question" that interests you. Write this topic at the top of a piece of paper, and below it create five columns labeled "10," "50," "100," "500," and "1,000" years from now. In each column, jot down your ideas about how the passing of time will affect this problem. Will it worsen? How quickly? Will it ever improve—and, if so, how? You may have just found the central idea for your own graphic novel.

Now it's your turn

Fascinating facts

Does a hobby, sport, or particular school subject fascinate you? Perhaps you have close friends or relatives who spend all their spare time on such a special interest. If so, you may already have found just the topic for a personally satisfying nonfiction graphic novel.

Scientist Jay Hosler combines his knowledge about bees with his love of drawing and storytelling in *Clan Apis*, a tale about the adventures of a honeybee. While Hosler creates fictional characters to represent typical bee behavior, author Jameson Anderson and artist Steve Erwin tell

the history of real people in *The Z-Boys and Skateboarding*. Look at these graphic novels or Jane Sutcliffe and Bob Lentz's *The Attack on Pearl Harbor* to see how different graphic novelists handle fascinating facts with flair.



CASE STUDY

Bryan Talbot's research for *The Tale of One Bad Rat*, his graphic novel about a fictional girl abused by her father, included reading books about rats and child abuse. Talbot also interviewed some victims of abuse.

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE



OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE BOX

Your graphic novel may be set in the real world, or it may show a fairy tale kingdom, a science fiction future, or the legendary or mythical past. You may even choose to show the inner landscape of a character's daydreams or nightmares.

Tips and techniques

Even if you expect someone else to illustrate your graphic novel, try drawing several panels yourself. This gives you a better sense of how little space exists inside panels for text.

Only your imagination limits you as you think “outside the box” for the content of your setting. Nonetheless, graphic novelists must think “inside the box” in some significant ways. Like comic books, each page of a graphic novel usually displays from one to nine outlined boxes with pictures and words that tell a story.

Another tradition places the descriptions of events or scenes in smaller rectangles set within panels. These rectangles are called narrative boxes. The narrative boxes in Blake Hoena's retelling of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (right) by Washington Irving, for example, are set off in light blue. Characters' speech, thoughts, or other sounds appear inside balloons.

Tips and techniques

Use narrative boxes with words such as “Far away” or “Meanwhile” to tell readers when you are moving the action somewhere else.



CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE

Watch your words

Written descriptions share space inside a panel with its picture. Almost always, the image is much larger than the narrative box. Be brief! Some writers set word limits for their narrative boxes or balloons. A typical limit might be no more than 30 words in a panel or no more than 17 words in a balloon. Writers sometimes choose to use phrases instead of complete sentences.

In *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel*, these words appear in a narrative box in a panel illustrated with the New York City skyline: "That summer I flew to New York with my family for the American Ballet Theater summer program to get a taste of the hard work of dancing." The next two panels show young Siena Cherson sweating as she



practices dancing. They share one narrative box, in which Siena writes, "Some days I felt I couldn't hold my legs up anymore."

In *To Dance*, the illustrations add vivid details that explain the writer's general remark. The illustrations take the place of the "word pictures" that an author would include if she were not writing her autobiography in graphic novel form.



No words

Sometimes graphic novels contain whole panels or pages with no words at all. Such pages permit readers to focus on the emotions shown on a character's face or through body language during an intense scene. Bryan Talbot uses this technique early in *The Tale of One Bad Rat*, when homeless Helen seems in despair and then runs from the police. As the writer of a graphic novel, you need to decide—either by yourself or with your artist partner—when and how to communicate the details of your novel through pictures instead of words.

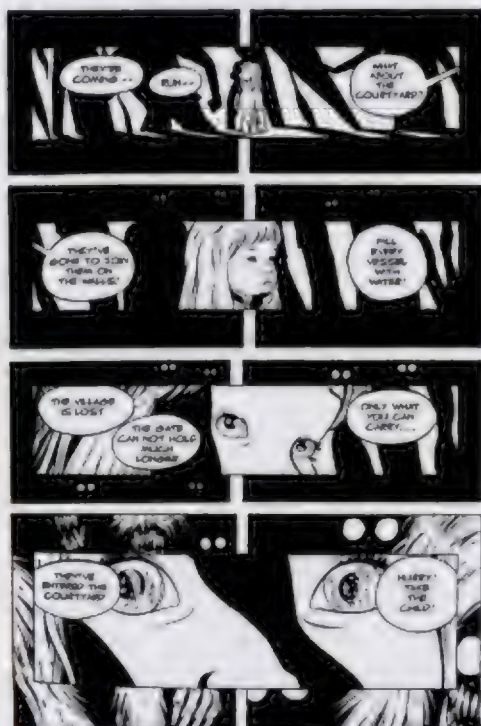
ZOOM IN AND OUT

Just like a motion picture, a graphic novel may have long-distance and middle-distance shots as well as close-ups.

A long-distance shot to establish the setting is a tradition many graphic artists follow. In *Bone* (right), the action begins with a long-distance shot and gets closer and closer until the character's eyes fill the panel.

Tips and techniques

Highlight tense, dramatic, or extraordinary moments by breaking with tradition. Have characters stand outside a panel or alongside a cluster of small, related panels. Or show events spilling outside the borders of a panel. Small panels laid over larger ones can emphasize tense moments in an important scene.



A colorful imagination

Color can clue your readers about whether the setting is real or imaginary—a character's daydream or nightmare. In *Babymouse: Queen of the World!*, Babymouse's real, everyday life is shown in black and white, with only brief touches of pink. Her happy daydreams about being a successful detective and space explorer and her frightening one of being trapped by a monster like Dr. Frankenstein's all have pink backgrounds.



Marjane Satrapi's everyday life in *Persepolis* is drawn and lettered in black against a white background. Her worst imaginings and nightmares are shown against a black background, with white lettering. Her award-winning animated film based on the graphic novel is also in black and white.

Be inspired

Let the real world add life to your setting. Bryan Talbot's *The Tale of One Bad Rat* began as a work about England's beautiful Lake District. This setting remained inspirational even when Talbot's emphasis shifted to how living in that area helps Helen heal her emotional wounds. Many of the countryside scenes in *The Tale of One Bad Rat* are based on real Lake District locations. The homes of Helen's favorite author, real-life writer Beatrix Potter, are featured.



Be supernatural

In *American Born Chinese*, graphic novelist Gene Yang sometimes sets events in the supernatural world. He shows the adventures of a character from Chinese mythology, the Monkey King, as he encounters other mythological figures. Yang shows how extraordinary these events are by omitting the borders from several full-page panels. Because this supernatural world is so far outside of daily life, traditional boundaries also do not apply there.

Now it's your turn

Be sensational!

Snap photographs of your setting or find them in the library or on the Internet. In your writing place, take 10 minutes to jot down details of these pictures. Bring your imagination into play. Besides seeing these sights, what would someone in this setting smell, hear, touch, or taste? How would

these experiences be different at various times of the day or year? Jot down your ideas. As you write your graphic novel, remember that even brief descriptions benefit from being "sensational." Such well-chosen words will add detail and set the mood for images in your novel.

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTERS



DISCOVER YOUR HERO

Your hero is the lead figure in your graphic novel. In an autobiography, that is you! In other stories, the hero may be human, a powerful being from legend or myth, or a fantastic creature from the worlds of fairy tales and folktales.

You may even decide to create a work with two heroes. Whatever your choice, your job is to make readers know and care about your characters. To have this connection, they need to understand what your hero or heroes think and feel.

What is the problem?

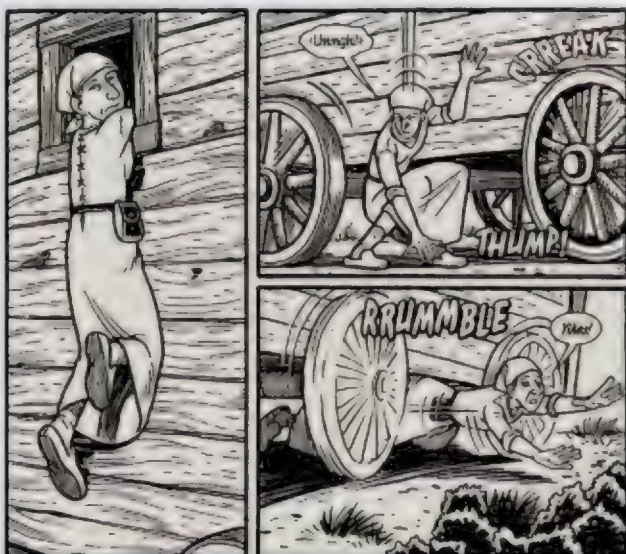
A hero faces problems. In traditional legends and myths, bold heroes often overcome physical dangers using their strength or wit. In the fantasy world of *City of Light*, *City of Dark*, 11-year-olds Carlos and Sarah bravely overcome their fears to face an evil man and supernatural creatures that threaten New York City. These daring young heroes prevent permanent gloom—shown in Brian Floca's darkly inked backgrounds—from taking hold there.

Not all problems, though, can be solved through physical bravery. In *The Tale of One Bad Rat*, teenager Helen (right) deals with the emotional scars left by abuse. That requires mental strength and determination. In *American Born Chinese*, Jin Wang faces prejudice throughout his school years. This prejudice ranges from name-calling bullies who steal his lunch to teachers who assume that every Asian-American child has come to the United States directly from China. Told by Jin that he is from San Francisco, his third-grade teacher changes her remarks but never apologizes. What problems confront your heroic characters?



Find a good name

Find a name for your hero that highlights an important quality. In *Clan Apis*, the central character Nyuki is a young, eager honeybee who overcomes fear as she learns how nature's laws govern her life. Author Jay Hosler points out that *Nyuki* is the Swahili word for "bee." His other bee characters also have names that mean "bee" in different languages. Graphic novelist Linda Medley takes a different approach for significant names. In *Castle Waiting*, she jokingly names one brave, bold hero Peaceful Hortense Elaine Warren (right). This quick-witted, quick-fisted character is anything but peaceful! The contrast between her name and actions is part of the fun in this upside-down retelling of "Sleeping Beauty" and other fairy tales.



Tips and techniques

Create a "character brief" for your hero, listing past adventures, accidents, hobbies, or other favorite activities. This information—along with age, height, weight, and hair and eye color—will help you or your artist partner "see" and sketch how the character looks, stands, and walks.



GIVE YOUR HERO WEAKNESSES

No one is perfect! One way to encourage readers to care about your hero is to show the character's flaws.



In *American Born Chinese*, prejudice influences Jin's opinion of himself and other Asian-Americans. To win a girlfriend in seventh grade, Jin curls his hair to look like a popular blond-haired classmate. Scorn is heaped on visiting

Chinese cousin Chin-Kee—whose appearance and speech, as well as name, match all the limited, prejudiced ideas that some people hold about Chinese-Americans.

Babymouse is so excited by popular Felicia Fuzzypaw's invitation to a slumber party that she abandons plans with her friend Wilson the Weasel. Babymouse tries to convince

herself that she is not acting badly, muttering "Wilson will understand, right?" But the unhappy expression on Babymouse's face shows that she wonders whether this is really true.

CASE STUDY

Gene Yang explains that Cousin Chin-Kee is not meant to be funny. "He's meant to come off the page and slap you in the face. If you're laughing at him, I want you to do so with a knot in your stomach and a dry throat." Chin-Kee is presented as an absurd racial stereotype. Yang says, "You're supposed to be offended. That was the desired response."



Now it's your turn

Being strong and brave

Heroes may perform daring deeds of physical strength and bravery. Sometimes, though, the battles they fight are less obvious. Overcoming the prejudices and low opinions of others takes a different kind of courage and determination. Dealing

with the emotional harm caused by abuse requires inner strength. Which kind of battles will your hero fight? Brainstorm and make a list of the problems your hero faces. Try to give this character more than one kind of battle to fight.

CREATE YOUR VILLAIN

Your villain provides a conflict or external problem that the hero must face.

In graphic novels, this character may be an individual or a group of people who govern a community. It may be a situation, such as pollution, caused by human acts. Or it may be difficulties, such as natural disaster or illness, that are outside human control. In real life, people sometimes look for villains to blame for out-of-control situations or problems they have caused themselves.

What is the motive?

Villains commit evil deeds for different reasons. They may be motivated by greed or jealousy. Or they may believe that their acts are not really evil at all.

In *Bone*, the monsters do what comes naturally—eat small creatures. But when an even bigger, meaner monster is on the loose, the creatures and monsters stick together. Sometimes young people commit wrongs because they do not understand the harm they are causing. Create a believable villain by showing this character's motives.



GETTING STARTED

SETTING THE SCENE

CHARACTERS

VIEWPOINT

*Now it's your turn***The face and form of evil**

What will your villain or villains look like? If you will be describing and drawing human villains, look at newspaper and magazine photos for inspiration. When you see a face or form that strikes you, spend 10 minutes in your writing place listing all the words that this photo brings to mind.

For nonhuman villains, consider the nature of different creatures. Art Spiegelman and the team of Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm use the hunter-prey relationship between cats and mice in their graphic novels. Spiegelman shows Jews as mice, while he portrays the Nazis who hunt them down as cats. In a lighter vein, Babymouse's school "enemy" is a popular cat, Felicia Fuzzypaws (below). What animals, birds, insects, or

other creatures have traditional qualities that match your villain? Perhaps a noisy, greedy crow or a silent, poisonous snake is the villain your graphic novel needs.



GRAPHIC NOVEL VILLAINS

Here are some frightening yet familiar villains:

A greedy man forces his employee to lie and steal for him:

*Theo, I want you to watch her. Follow her. Befriend her.
And when she finds the token—ahem—take it.*
Avi, *City of Light, City of Dark: A Comic-Book Novel*

Soldiers carry out orders to destroy groups of innocent people:

*Two days ago the Nazis marched them to a forest ...
And they shot all of them—they killed 600 people!*
Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*

Government leaders brutally force their beliefs about proper clothing on others:

*So I went with them. I passed out flyers ...
"Guns may shoot and knives may carve, but we won't wear your silly scarves!"
... when suddenly things got nasty.*

"The scarf or a beating!"
Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*



A popular student speaks cruelly about someone else:

"Penny Poodle will never be pretty no matter how much she combs her hair!"
Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm, *Babymouse: Queen of the World!*

Develop a supporting cast

How your hero interacts with other characters tells a great deal about this person. You can add details or descriptions that bring minor characters to life.

Just a sentence or even a few words can make an enormous difference.

The expression on a character's face or how she stands or holds her body also reveals much.

Tips and techniques

Bring minor characters to life with at least one special interest, manner of speech, or physical feature.

In *Castle Waiting*, the tragedy in Iron Henry's life is shown by how little this sad minor character ever speaks. His silence says much. In the novel, no one seems surprised that creatures such as bear shopkeepers and stork butlers dress, act, and speak just like the human characters. Linda Medley's illustrations of these creatures interacting with humans reveal the fairy tale nature of this world. She shows rather than explains its magical qualities.



In *Bone*, the two rat monsters always chasing Phoney Bone argue constantly about what they will do when they catch him:

"Please, comrade! I just want to chop him up for the stew!"

"And that's another thing! I'm tired of stew! I want to put him in a crust and bake a light fluffy quiche!"

Jeff Smith, *Bone*

Their ongoing debate about quiche is so silly that readers know that the real danger comes from other villains in the novel.

CHAPTER 4: VIEWPOINT

CHOOSE A POINT OF VIEW

Who will tell the story of your graphic novel—its hero or another of its characters? How much do you want readers to know about the characters and what they think and feel? Before you write this novel, you must choose a point of view or points of view for it.

Omniscient viewpoint

Many myths and fairy tales are traditionally told from the all-seeing and all-knowing—the omniscient—point of view. The storyteller or narrator describes what all the characters think and feel and also shares knowledge of events beyond the characters' knowledge. This is how the myth of the Monkey King, an ancient Chinese tale retold in *American Born Chinese* (right), begins:



Linda Medley also uses the traditional omniscient viewpoint to begin *Castle Waiting*, her fractured retelling of fairy tales and nursery rhymes. Her illustration for the first panel (left) “sees” and “knows” more than any one person could. The bird’s-eye or heavenly view of the port town is shown as it might appear on an ancient map. Yet the omniscient viewpoint is not the only one used in these graphic novels.

Tips and techniques
Have images in your graphic novel show its point of view.

First-person viewpoint

The first-person viewpoint, using “I” or “we,” permits readers to hear someone’s inner thoughts or actual speech. Marjane Satrapi and Siena Cherson Siegel both use the first-person viewpoint in their graphic novel autobiographies.

Dance is so important to young Siena that she sees it with her mind’s eye even while watching a football game with her family. At that point, artist Mark Siegel’s drawings of football players straining, running, and grabbing at a ball—a contrast to Siena’s thoughts—help readers better understand Siena’s love of dance.



In *American Born Chinese*, novelist Gene Yang alternates the Monkey King’s tale with the first-person accounts of Jin Wang as he grows up and also remembers past events. Jin describes a crush he had on a girl in junior high school:

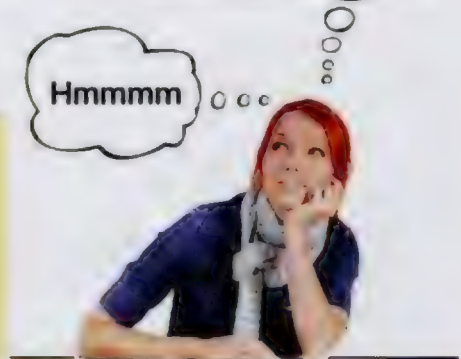
I would lie awake late analyzing my feelings for her. She wasn’t exceptionally beautiful and she spoke with a slight lisp.
Gene Yang, *American Born Chinese*

Small bubbles indicate I’m thinking.

Hmmmm

Tips and techniques

First-person thoughts may be put in narrative boxes. Or place them in word balloons linked to the character with small bubbles instead of a spoken word balloon “tail.”



VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW

Some graphic novels contain several first-person viewpoints. Sometimes the story is told from the hero's viewpoint. Sometimes the villain may tell the story.

Beginning with its fourth chapter, much of *Castle Waiting* is told from the first-person viewpoints of its two heroes, Jain (right) and Peaceful Warren.

Bone is also told from multiple first-person viewpoints. Readers "hear" the words and thoughts of heroic Thorn as well as the three Bone cousins. Sometimes the story is told through the first-person viewpoints of the villain Briar or minor characters such as the young possums who help the Bone cousins.

Having many viewpoints permits novelist Jeff Smith to tell about events occurring at the same time but in different locations. This adds to the suspense, since we must wait to see what happens next to each narrator.

In *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Art Spiegelman alternates between his own first-person viewpoint and that of his father, whose real-life experiences Spiegelman retells in the pages of this book.



Third-person viewpoint

The third-person viewpoint follows the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of one character. The character only knows what others think or feel by interacting with them. The graphic novelist refers to this narrator, who may be the hero, by the person's name and "he" or "she." Multiple third-person viewpoints similarly follow the limited views of two or more characters. *The Z-Boys and Skateboarding* (right) is told mainly through a combination of third-person and multiple third-person viewpoints.

Later the author describes the victory of skateboarder Peggi Oki, among others. In addition to this third-person narration, the author includes first-person dialogue to add life to this historical account.



Tips and techniques

Place descriptions of past events in narrative boxes. These may be told from the omniscient viewpoint or other points of view.

Now it's your turn

Seeing other points of view

Before you decide on the point of view for your novel, experiment. Take 10 minutes to write it from the omniscient viewpoint. Now take another 10 minutes to write it from the hero's point of view. Finally take 10 minutes to write

these same events from the viewpoint of the villain or a minor character. Which version do you like best? Do you need a viewpoint beyond the knowledge of any one character to communicate all the events in the novel?

CHAPTER 5: SYNOPSSES AND PLOTS



TELL YOUR STORY'S STORY

As your story takes shape like a rescue planned by a clever superhero, it is a good idea to describe it in a paragraph or two. This is called a synopsis.

If someone asked, “What is this graphic novel about?” these paragraphs would be the answer. An editor often wants to see a synopsis of a story before accepting it for publication. Your synopsis will also help you communicate your ideas to an artist partner.

Study back cover blurbs

Studying the information on the back cover of a book—called the blurb—will help you write an effective synopsis. A good blurb contains a brief summary of a book's content. It also gives the tone of the book—whether it is serious or funny. Most important of all, the blurb makes readers want to open the book and read it cover to cover! That is certainly true of this blurb:



After being run out of Bonesville, the three Bone Cousins, Fone Bone, Phoney Bone, and Smiley Bone are separated and lost in a vast uncharted forest. One by one, they find their way into a deep forested valley filled with wonderful and terrifying creatures. It will be the longest—but funniest—year of their lives.

Jeff Smith, *Bone*

Now it's your turn

Be bold with a blurb

Write a blurb for the graphic novel you plan to write. Summarizing it in one or two paragraphs will sharpen your ideas. Use or expand this blurb for your synopsis.

Make a story map

One way to plan your graphic novel is to think of it the way filmmakers prepare a movie. They must know the main story episodes before the cameras start shooting! They must also map out the plot (the sequence of events) in a series of sketches called storyboards. You can do this for your graphic novel. The blurb you wrote will help you here.



Now it's your turn

Lights! Camera! Action!

Reread your blurb. Use it to identify the most important events in the graphic novel. You are now ready to sketch the "scenes" for the novel's story. Under each sketched scene, jot down brief notes about what you will mention about this event.

Use this series of storyboards as a helpful outline. If your retelling of this story has chapters, each scene may be a separate chapter. Perhaps two or more scenes will fit together well in one chapter.

THINK ABOUT YOUR THEME

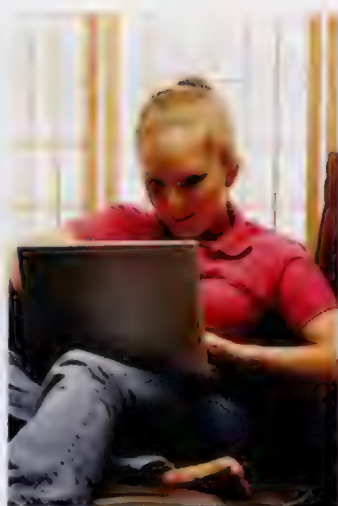
As you plan your scenes, think about your graphic novel's theme.

Is it about bravely facing danger to oppose evil? Is it about learning that friendship and community are more valuable than wealth? These are beliefs that the Bone cousins learn and demonstrate in *Bone*. What messages—if any—does your graphic novel send readers about the right way to behave?

Need a partner?

Will you illustrate as well as write your own graphic novel? Your drawing or computer skills may make you the best person for this task. Or you may already have an artist partner in

mind. To find a partner, ask your teacher, your school's art and computer teachers, or an art teacher or youth leader at a community center for suggestions. Bring your synopsis and character briefs for the hero and villain to your first meeting with a possible art partner. Talk about the styles of illustration the artist uses.



CASE STUDY

For the sister-brother team of Jennifer and Matthew Holm, words come first in their *Babymouse* novels. Once the manuscript is "in shape," says Matthew, the illustrator (right), he makes thumbnail sketches and e-mails them "to Jenni, who then cuts these out and pastes them down into a rough layout." Matthew explains that he then reworks the sketches. "She comments and I make changes, and we again get our editors' approval. ... It requires a lot of back and forth, and we are both free to make changes at any point."



Write a script

At this point, some graphic novelists develop their storyboards even further into a script. This is a detailed, step-by-step plan of what each page of the novel will contain. It includes a description of the illustration in each panel on the page, the words inside that panel's narrative box or boxes, and the words shown inside the panel's word balloons. This kind of script can be a useful way to communicate your ideas to an illustrator. It can also be a fine way for you to firm up your ideas for yourself.

Other graphic novelists work back and forth with illustrators to develop the script of the novel. These writers make the final decisions about the words that appear in their works. But they draw inspiration from the images an artist creates based on the author's blurb, character sketches, and storyboards. If you have an artist partner for your graphic novel, it may take a few work sessions to determine how you work together best.

Tips and techniques

A script may be much longer than the final graphic novel. Sometimes, authors write two to four pages of script to describe one page of the novel.



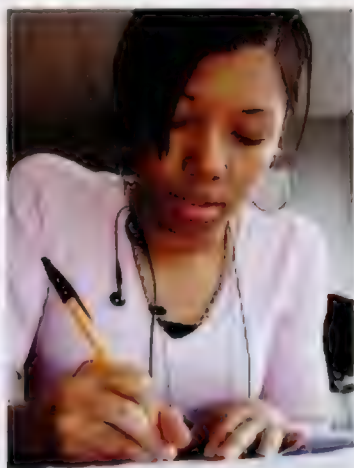
CASE STUDY

Writers of graphic novels may work with more than one artist. The penciler is the person who creates illustrations for the book's storyboard. The inker adds color or fills in hand-drawn, black-and-white pictures to create textures and shades of gray. The letterer chooses or creates the fonts, draws word balloons, and figures out the size and placement for balloons.

Tips and techniques

Ask artists who might illustrate your novel if they also want to create its letters and word balloons. You may need a second art partner for these jobs.

BAIT THE HOOK



Some good beginnings

A mysterious, scary beginning:

Your beginning could be mysterious and slightly scary, if this matches the content of the novel. That is how Michael Burgan begins his retelling of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (right). Avi and Brian Floca begin their fantasy novel *City of Light*,

City of Dark in a similar way. They present readers with a double-page picture of bare, twisted trees, seen from above from the viewpoint of creatures casting strange, long shadows. Large letters describe the terrible noises these creatures are making: "SCREEEEEEEEEEEE SCREEEEEEEEEEEE SCREEEEEEEEEEEE." Off to one side, five small human figures seem blasted by both the noise and the wind. In the middle of the trees, an omniscient narrator tells readers in a word balloon: "To begin with—there were KURBS." On the opposite page, this narrator explains further:

These Kurbs owned an Island as well as the sky above it. And with their POWER they controlled both day and night. For Kurbs have always thrived in darkness, turning to the dark as moths turn to the light.
Avi, *City of Light*, *City of Dark: A Comic-Book Novel*

Now that you have planned your graphic novel, how will you catch and keep the reader's attention? You might choose a fascinating first sentence and image to hook readers into your work. Then you can reel them in with the next exciting panels in the novel.



CHAPTER 5: SYNOPSES AND PLOTS



Tips and techniques

A graphic novel might start on page 5. But page 5 may be in the back of the book! In Japan, a manga is read from right to left and from back to front. Some American publishers of Japanese series use this same format. So when you open one of these books from the front, here is what you might see: You're Reading in the Wrong Direction!!

A familiar, funny beginning:

Your beginning could be familiar and funny.

That describes the double-page opening created by Jennifer and Matthew Holm in *Babymouse: Queen of the World!*

The page on the left shows a diagonal row of four small panels, each containing a ringing alarm clock. In the bottom panel, a hand slaps the alarm clock, with a loud "FWAP!"

The page on the right shows a bedroom filled with messy piles of schoolbooks and a bed with a quilt-covered, large lump. Readers realize just who that slapping hand belongs to when they read the word balloon coming from outside this page: "Are you getting up, Babymouse?"



Tips and techniques

If your graphic novel is set in a faraway place or the distant past, consider writing a preface or opening author's note for it. This extra introduction contains background information that may be unfamiliar to readers. Marjane Satrapi begins *Persepolis* in this way, with a short history and a description of Iran (left).

BUILD THE SUSPENSE

After your exciting opening, do not let the excitement die. Keep and build suspense for your readers by crafting the graphic novel in ways that emphasize the dramatic events to come.

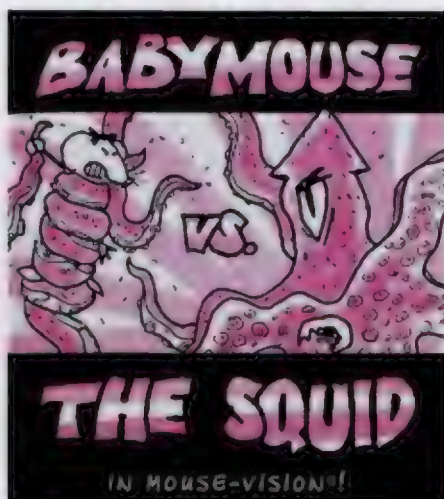
Thrills and chills

A good way to keep readers on the edge of their seats is to place characters in a race against time. In *City of Light, City of Dark*, Sarah and Carlos must find a magical token before noon on December 21. Brian Floca makes readers feel how tense this race becomes on the deadline day by drawing small panels with a clock inside a larger panel. One small panel shows the clock's hands close to noon, while the other shows 12 o'clock exactly. In *Bone*, the cousins and the hero, Thorn, race to defeat evil Briar and other villains before they destroy the city and become all-powerful.

Another way to build suspense is to hint at coming danger. Jeff Smith uses this technique—called foreshadowing—in *Bone*. He has Grandma Rose mention a mysterious event still in Thorn's future. Rose is keeping secrets from granddaughter Thorn because, she says, Thorn "might be in **more** danger if she knows! She hasn't reached the **turning** yet!" We readers do not know what "the turning" is, but we now know that it is coming. We wait for it in dreadful suspense.

Cliff-hangers

When you end a scene or chapter with a character in danger, readers will eagerly turn the page to find out what happens next. Jennifer and Matthew Holm use such cliff-hangers whenever Babymouse imagines she is in fantastic trouble. At right is how one terrifying daydream begins:



CHAPTER 5: SYNOPSES AND PLOTS

Keep interest high

In *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi ends a chapter with a full-page cliff-hanger (right): Young Marjane is floating in black outer space, with only a few stars and planets behind her. She remembers, “And so I was lost, without any bearings. ... What could be worse than that?” The answer comes in a jagged-edge word balloon. That announcement, together with the author’s explanation—“It was the beginning of the war”—propel us immediately to the next chapter.

Another way to keep interest high is to let your readers know more than the characters do. This technique—called dramatic irony—encourages readers to see what other “secrets” the novelist may share with them.



Character conflict

As in real life, characters may be involved in more than one conflict. Maintain suspense by moving back and forth between the problems your characters face. Readers wonder in *Bone* not only about who will win battles but whether Fone Bone will win Thorn as his sweetheart. In *City of Light*, *City of Dark*, will Sarah and her mother find each other?

Now it's your turn

The plot thickens

Examine your storyboards or script. For each scene, make notes to indicate any conflicts your hero or narrator experiences during that event or time. Maintain

suspense by including these conflicts as you write the novel. Remember to include any subplot struggles as well as conflicts related to the main plot.

END WITH A BANG

Stories build up suspense until they reach a climax. After that, the characters' main problems are often solved, although others may remain. If characters go back to their old lives, they have learned something, conquered an enemy, or overcome a weakness.

The climax

A climax is often very dramatic. A battle, a highly emotional meeting between characters, or the solution to a great mystery or problem often tops off the suspense.

In *American Born Chinese*, the climax happens when Danny hits Chin-Kee. The hidden identity of each character comes to light then, and readers learn all the

mysterious connections between the Monkey King myth and the modern story told in this novel.

Conclude your adventure

Almost everyone likes a happy ending, but believable stories usually do not have completely happy endings. Some problems remain in the characters' lives. The Bone cousins find their way back to Bonesville, but they leave behind good friends in the magical valley they all defended. One of those good friends died in the last great battle.



Now it's your turn

Choose your own ending

Reread one of your favorite graphic novels and think about its ending. Could it have ended in other ways? Write one of

these new endings. Put it aside. Then go back and read both versions of the novel. Which one do you prefer—and why?



CHAPTER 5: SYNOPSSES AND PLOTS

Suggest new beginnings

A good ending often suggests that the characters, having conquered an enemy or gained new knowledge, are ready for new adventures. As Siena Cherson Siegel concludes:

At eighteen I stopped dancing. I had a terrible ankle injury the year before. Instead I went to college, a difficult and complete change for me, but I needed to grow and develop in new ways. And I did.
Siena Cherson Siegel, *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel*

By the end of *Good-bye, Chunky Rice*, Chunky and Dandel learn that their friendship will last even if they live far apart and have separate adventures. This is shown in a final panel that mirrors the opening one. Both panels have a black background and show an object that goes “clunk.” In the first panel, this is the rock that Dandel used to wake Chunky to say farewell. In the last panel, it is the letter-carrying bottle Dandel has sent to sailor Chunky, thudding against his ship. Her feelings, though, have changed, as shown in the panel facing the last page (right): “There is no good bye, Chunky Rice.”

Bad endings

Create a great graphic novel by avoiding a bad ending.

Bad endings are ones that:

- fizzle out or end abruptly because you’ve run out of ideas
- fail to show how the characters have changed in some way
- are too good to be true
- are too grim and depressing and leave readers with no hope



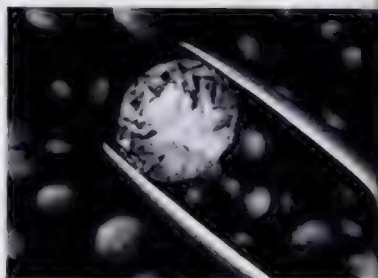
Tips and techniques

A good ending often links back to the beginning. This reminds readers of how much has changed during the graphic novel.

CHAPTER 6: WINNING WORDS

MAKE YOUR WORDS WORK

Space limits the words in a graphic novel, but this limit only makes them more valuable. Treat words like rare diamonds, and your reward will be a storytelling treasure.



The sounds of life

Well-chosen words add the sensation of real life to everyday scenes. They also transport readers to faraway places and times. They make astonishing events and creatures seem as real as next-door neighbors.

Words describing sounds are an important part of graphic novels. From the “RINGG!!!” of the loud school bell that startles Babymouse to the “clunk” of the rock Dandel throws at Chunky Rice’s window, they add the sensations of real life to everyday scenes.

Combined with the illustrations in a panel, these words call upon several of the readers’ senses. We not only hear the bell ring, but the short lines drawn around it let us “see” it vibrate. We not only hear the rock clunk, but we see how it must have dropped quickly to the pavement that now supports it.

Such “sound effects” help readers experience extraordinary events, too. The terrible attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, is re-created for readers through images of bombs

that explode with a loud “KABOOM!” and “SHAKOOM!”

Deadly torpedoes speed through the ocean with a softer but equally frightening sound—“SSWOSHH!!”

Carefully chosen sound words put us right on the scene in *The Attack on Pearl Harbor*.



CHAPTER 6: WINNING WORDS

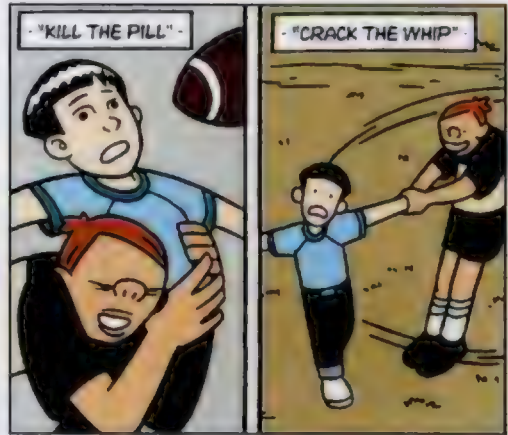
Even impossible, magical events seem real when a cleverly chosen sound effect accompanies a startling image. In *Castle Waiting*, Linda Medley uses a double-page panel to spotlight the huge change that overtakes the castle when its princess triggers a curse and becomes Sleeping Beauty. In an instant, a huge forest of thick vines and branches springs up to keep out possible rescuers. This magical event is signaled by a thunderous noise: “RRUUMMM THOOM!” By placing this “loud” sound in the middle of this spread, Medley makes us realize how quickly this magical change occurred.

Tips and techniques

Figure out a word for your sound effect by using your voice to imitate the sound you hear. Then spell out that sound. Use special fonts to highlight sound effects.

When a bad match is good

Sometimes, though, not having words match an image is also revealing. In *American Born Chinese*, Jin Wang’s only third-grade “friend” is the school bully. Jin puts up with this boy’s cruelty because it is the only attention he gets. Yet the frightened expression on Jin’s face when they play “Kill the Pill” and the stiff, scared way he holds his body when they play “Crack the Whip” show how much Jin dislikes these cruel, painful games. The contrast between the children’s games named in these narrative boxes and the images of Jin shows how unhappy he is then.



Tips and techniques

Explain or fine-tune expressions on characters’ faces with well-chosen words. Is that unhappy face the result of being sad or sick? How excited is a character by an event? Does the contrast between a character’s words and appearance show how the character truly feels?



USE VIVID IMAGERY

Bring some scenes to life by creating vivid word pictures with similes and metaphors.

Linda Medley uses a simile in this narrative box describing a wicked witch:

Even deeper in the forest lived another witch, but the King was loath to visit her, for the art she practiced was as black as the inside of your hat at midnight.

Linda Medley, *Castle Waiting*



This old-fashioned expression about the “dark art” of witchcraft—the evil spells—does not mean that the witch made things black. Comparing her witchcraft to the inside of a hat in the dark means that she used witchcraft to perform deeds so evil that they could only be done secretly, at night, out of everyone’s sight.

Gene Yang uses a metaphor when the astonished Wien asks about Jin’s extreme new hairstyle:

“Why is his hair a **broccoli**!” Wien does not mean that Jin’s hair has turned into broccoli, but its many tight curls look like a head of that round, bumpy vegetable. This word picture communicates how ridiculous Jin’s hairstyle is.



Tips and techniques

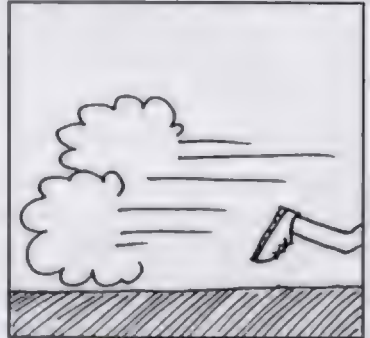
A metaphor describes something by calling it something else—for instance, a greedy person might be called a “pig.” A simile describes something by comparing it to something with the word “like” or “as.” For example, a person is as gentle as a lamb.



In between words and pictures

Just like people who send e-mail, graphic novelists sometimes use shortcuts instead of words. These are symbols that have come to represent particular feelings or actions. If space is tight in your panels and such shortcuts suit the tone of your work, consider using these symbols:

- Spirals called “squeans” (top right) represent confusion or dizziness.
- Clouds of dust called “briffits” (right) indicate when someone is running away.
- Sweat drops called “plewds” show anxiety or hard physical work.
- Straight lines that trail after something to indicate great speed are called “hites.”



CASE STUDY

Famous cartoonist Mort Walker invented the cartoon vocabulary words called Symbolia, including those explained above. He created the *Beetle Bailey* and *H-I and Lois* comic strips.

CHAPTER 7: SCINTILLATING SPEECH

USE DRAMATIC DIALOGUE

Dialogue lets readers “hear” characters as they speak. It helps readers understand different personalities and the relationships between people.

Adding mood and suspense

Done well, dialogue is a powerful story-telling tool—one that adds color, mood, and suspense even as it moves the plot forward. In *Clan Apis*, a hungry praying mantis would like nothing better than to eat a frightened young bee. Scientist and author Jay Hosler shows the bug’s power and the bee’s fearful surprise not only through LARGER LETTERS but by placing their words in jagged-edged word balloons.

In graphic novels, word balloons substitute for the quotation marks that traditionally enclose spoken words. The placement of these balloons inside panels substitutes for words such as “he said” or “she said,” which often introduce speech in print.



Tips and techniques

Match the size, shape, and type of line you use for dialogue balloons to the content of a person's speech.

Use jagged or ragged lines to indicate angry yelling or frightened screaming.

Place **SHOUTS** in large balloons.

Use bubble tails for thought balloons.

Place whispers in small balloons.

Now it's your turn

Listen in

Tune in to the way people talk. Turn on the radio or TV for 10 minutes, and copy down bits of conversation. Or jot down what you overhear on a bus or in school or a store. You will begin to notice how people often have favorite expressions and different rhythms to their speech. Sometimes someone may not wait to talk until the other person is finished. How can you use these different speech patterns in the dialogue you write? Rewrite at least two conversations in your graphic novel using a different speech pattern. Put aside your new versions for a while, and then go back and see which version you like more.

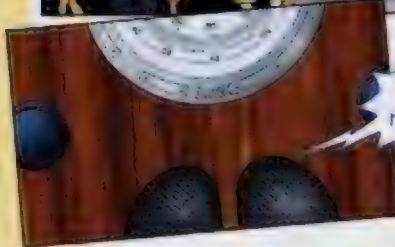


USE DIFFERENT VOICES

Writing dialogue is a challenge even for skilled writers. Remember that characters should not sound like you. How they speak often reveals a great deal about them.

Tips and techniques

Use thin, light letters or italics to show speech coming from a TV, radio, phone, or other machine. Captured Off Guard: The Attack on Pearl Harbor (right) by Donald Lemke uses this technique.



Social background:

Solomon's word choice in *Good-bye, Chunky Rice* (left) shows his lack of education when he talks about his pet bird, Merle.

Foreign background:

Chin-Kee's speech in *American Born Chinese* exaggerates the pronunciation and word choice problems of Chinese people learning English:

"Ha Ha! Dis day so fun, Cousin Da-Nee!
Chin-Kee so ruv Amellican school!"
Gene Yang, *American Born Chinese*

CHAPTER 7: SCINTILLATING SPEECH

Time period:

In *Babymouse: Queen of the World!* (right), Babymouse uses 1940s slang, just like the movie detective she imagines herself to be:

It was a day like any other in the big city. The name's Babymouse, Private Eye. There I was, minding my own business.

Family background:

In Avi's *City of Light, City of Dark: A Comic-Book Novel*, Carlos and his family speak Spanish as well as English in their New York home:

"Hola, Mama." [Hi, Mom.]

*"Carlos! Me temo que tenemos que ir nose pronto a casa."
[Carlos! I am afraid we have to go home soon.]*

Fantasy background:

A made-up language shows that characters are creatures of fantasy:

"Ik gaven spek Nessen."

"What are they saying? I don't understand ..."

"They were speaking Nessen ... an ancient rat creature language reserved for times of war and military emergency."

Jeff Smith, *Bone*



Tips and techniques

Make up a language for fantastic or fairy tale creatures and use bits of it in your dialogue. Have fun helping readers hear as well as see the characters and events in your graphic novel.

CHAPTER 8: HINTS AND TIPS

BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK

Even famous writers sometimes get stuck for words or ideas. This is called **writer's block**.

If you have been following the writer's golden rule (writing regularly and often), you already have some ways to battle writer's block. Here are some of its causes and other weapons to use.



Your inner critic

Do not listen to that inner voice that might whisper negative ideas about your writing. All writers try out and then throw away some of their efforts. When Yumi Hotta began writing the *Hikaru No Go* books, she had trouble creating a central character, teenager Tetsuo Kato. She says, "I had to redo his personality many times. First he was a high-spirited delinquent. Then he became a high-spirited Shogi [the Asian version of chess] fanatic. Then he became a dark and gloomy delinquent. ... His character finally came together when I combined them all into a 'high-spirited, but slightly gloomy delinquent who is a Shogi fanatic.'"

Tips and techniques

*Carry a notebook and pen around with you to jot down ideas whenever they occur. Yumi Hotta got the idea for *Hikaru No Go* while watching her father-in-law play a game of Go.*



Award-winning author Avi says, "It's hard for everyone to write well. I have to rewrite over and over again." Avi even questions whether "writer's block" is an accurate term: "Not knowing what to put down for the next sentence is what my life is all about in the sense that you're always struggling to make sure it's right, it's well written, and what comes next. And that's not writer's block; that's writing."

Now it's your turn

A character-building activity

Stuck in the middle of your graphic novel? Get to know your characters better. Have them talk to one another. What makes them angry, happy, or embarrassed? Then have one or more characters write you a letter complaining about the story or other characters. Jeff Smith gets inspiration by “listening” to his characters talk

to one another. He says, “I kind of get, you know, Fone Bone talking to Phoney Bone, or Phoney Bone arguing with Smiley Bone—and just get them going back and forth in my head. And the characters, as you’re role-playing, will kind of take over.”

No ideas

Many writers find taking a break helps. A walk through your neighborhood or even doing chores might refresh you. Jennifer L. Holm, who writes at her kitchen table, has a particularly delicious way of taking a break. She says whenever she experiences writer’s block, she “stops and dishes herself a bowl of chocolate ice cream”!

Learn the tricks of the trade

Writing may seem lonely. Some writers take heart by sharing their works in progress with other writers. They meet regularly in person or over the Internet with “writing buddies.” These critique groups help fight writer’s block by sharing ideas, experiences, and even goals. If you are working with an artist partner, however, you already have someone who shares your concerns. Your partner may be able to help with more than art. Yumi Hotta has such a partner for the *Hikaru No Go* books: “Oftentimes I have trouble with storyboards. When that happens, I just keep telling myself, ‘It’s okay. Obata Sensei [Mr. Obata, the illustrator] will think of something.’”



CHAPTER 9: THE NEXT STEP

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Congratulations! Completing your own graphic novel is a great achievement. You have learned a lot about writing and probably about yourself, too. You are now ready to take the next step in creating wonderful new stories.

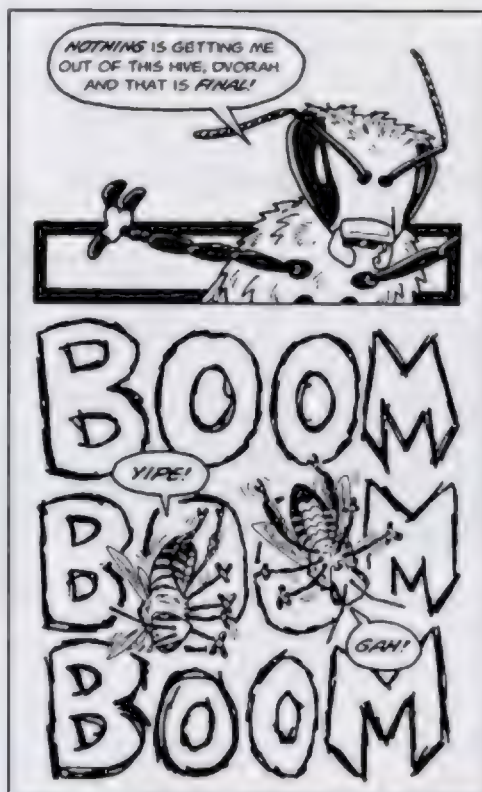


Another graphic novel?

While working on this graphic novel, you may have discovered a related topic that fascinates you. Since writing *Clan Apis*, (right), scientist Jay Hosler has published graphic novels about other insects, such as mites and beetles. Perhaps reading many graphic novels has inspired you to write a different kind of graphic novel. If your first one was fiction, you may want to write an autobiography or other nonfiction graphic novel.

A sequel?

Is there more to tell about the characters in your graphic novel? Since *Babymouse: Queen of the World!*, Jennifer and Matthew Holm have published five sequels following the further adventures of their daydreaming hero. Perhaps your next book will be the sequel to your graphic novel.





CASE STUDY

Maybe your next work will be a prequel to your graphic novel. Jeff Smith worked on two graphic novels telling about earlier events in the world of *Bone*. He says that the fairy tale countryside in *Bone* is based on “the foothills and gorges and caves and forests” of southern Ohio, where he grew up. Smith modeled his fairy tale city—one that once “had great glory, but has since fallen on hard times”—on the city of Kathmandu in Nepal. He spent a week there, taking photographs and drawing pictures. Details in *Bone*’s city, such as “alleys and temples, things that people have in their front yards,” all resemble Kathmandu.

Now it's your turn

Imagine that!

Brainstorm your next story with pen and paper. Think of a fairy tale, legend, folktale, or tall tale (Paul Bunyan, perhaps?) that you enjoyed reading. List five things that might have happened to the hero or creatures there before or after the events described in the story. Do not worry about punctuation or grammar as you jot down ideas. Repeat this process with another story. When you are done, you may have found the characters and plot for your next writing project.



LEARN FROM THE AUTHORS

You can learn a great deal from the advice of successful writers. Almost all will tell you that hard work and occasional failure are part of the writing lifestyle. Yet even though few writers earn enough from their books to make a living, they value their ability to create and communicate through written words.

Avi

As a child, Avi loved to read comic books—especially scary ones! He did not do well in school, though, and even flunked out of one high school. An English teacher told Avi's parents that Avi was one of the worst students he ever had! The shy 16-year-old began to write seriously when a summer-time tutor had faith in him.

At the time, Avi and others did not realize that his school problems were caused by dysgraphia, a condition that causes reading and writing difficulties. Today this award-winning author of more than 60 books uses the computer's spell-check program to catch the spelling problems he still has. "The computer has been a lifesaver," he says.

Avi's real name is Edward Wortis. His twin sister, Emily, gave him the nickname Avi when they were very young, and it stuck. It's the only name he uses.

Avi worked as a librarian for 25 years to support himself and his family. Only then did he earn enough money from his writing to write full time, which he loves. "To the extent I hear and see what's happening with ... characters, I'm inventing the truth." He believes that "reading is the key to writing. The more you read, the better your writing can be." He also recommends you write "what you honestly feel, then learn from the criticism that will always come your way."



Jennifer L. Holm

As a child, Jennifer Holm loved to read all kinds of books. She and her four brothers fought, though, over the Sunday newspaper comics they all enjoyed. Today, Holm says, "I still love comic books and graphic novels and I think reading them has helped make me a better writer."

After college, she worked in television broadcasting. "I had always wanted to be a writer," she says, but she did not pursue it until an old family diary inspired her. Two of her novels are rooted in her family's history and both were chosen as Newbery Honor Books. Today Holm splits her time between writing and raising her son. She and her husband, Jonathan Hamel, have written a series together called *The Stink Files*.

Holm says, "I work out a lot of demons in my novels." By contrast, she finds that "*Babymouse* is just so joyful to write." She urges young readers to "drop your favorite author a note. You never know ... they just might call you back!"



CASE STUDY

Marjane Satrapi believes writing an autobiography was the best way to tell people about life in troubled Iran in the 1980s and early 1990s. She says, "It's best to talk in my own name. If you try to talk in terms of a people, nationality, a culture, it doesn't mean anything." Writing about one person, Satrapi believes, permits readers to imagine themselves in that person's position.

PREPARE YOUR WORK

Let your graphic novel rest in your desk or on a shelf for several weeks. Then when you read it through, you will have fresh eyes to spot any flaws.



Edit your work

Reading your work aloud is one way to make the writing crisper. Now is the time to check spelling and punctuation. When the graphic novel's writing is as good as it can be, prepare a final handwritten or computer-printed copy. This is your manuscript.

Think of a title

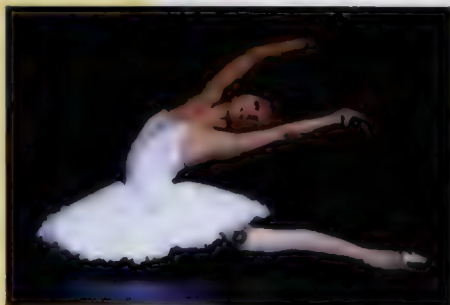
Great titles capture the reader's interest. They not only indicate the subject of the book but also make the reader want to learn more about it. *Good-bye, Chunky Rice* is a more compelling title than

"Leaving Friends Is Hard." Sometimes titles also indicate the author's voice. The Holms' title, *Babymouse: Queen of the World!* reflects the joking, good-natured way they look at this character's hopes and fears. Their entertaining sequels have fun-filled titles, too, such as *Babymouse: Our Hero*.



Tips and techniques

Chapter titles should also reflect the tone as well as the content of your work. In *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel*, the graceful, exciting world of ballet is captured in chapter titles such as "Dying Swan," "My First Audition," and "Backstage!"

**Be professional**

If your school has a computer lab, use equipment there to print or make copies of your graphic novel. For a professional presentation, print a cover letter to send with your novel if you submit it for publication.

This letter should be printed on one side of white paper, with wide margins and double spacing. Include your novel's synopsis in the letter. Your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and the date should appear in the upper left corner of the first page. Number every page of your manuscript and include your name and e-mail address on each.

**Tips and techniques**

Always make a copy of your graphic novel before you give it to others to read. Otherwise, if they lose it, you may have lost all your valuable work.

REACH YOUR AUDIENCE

The next step is to find an audience for your graphic novel. Family members or classmates may be receptive. Members of a community group might like to read your work. Or you may want to share your work through a Web site, a literary magazine, or a publishing house.



The long road to publication

Many graphic novels began as shorter works. Jeff Smith published chapters of *Bone* as separate books over a period of 12 years. He paid for the printing of these books himself and only began to earn some money from them after the first two years. The chapters of *Clan Apis* and *Castle Waiting* also appeared as individual books. Do you want readers to see all of your graphic novel right away, or will you follow this long road to publication?

Some places to publish parts of your work

Several magazines and writing Web sites accept graphic novel chapters from young authors. Some give writing advice and run regular competitions. Each site has its own rules about submitting work, so remember to read these carefully. Here are three more ideas:

- Send part of your graphic novel to your school newspaper.
- Watch your local newspaper or magazines for writing competitions you could enter.
- Use a personal Web site—your own, your family's, or a friend's—to put up your chapter. To build your audience, announce when the next chapter will be online.



Tips and techniques

Most e-mail accounts have enough Web space to host a page of a graphic novel. Use library and Internet resources to learn more about Web publishing.

Finding a publisher

Study the market to find out which publishers produce graphic novels. Information about whether they accept submissions can be found in writers handbooks at your local library, on the Web, and even at comic book conventions. Remember that manuscripts that haven't been asked for or paid for by a publisher—called unsolicited manuscripts—are rarely published. Always enclose your cover letter and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your graphic novel's return.

Remember, too, that some graphic novelists have gotten their start by publishing their books themselves. When he was 16, Craig Thompson did this with his first graphic novel.

Writer's tip

Don't lose heart if an editor rejects your graphic novel. See this as a chance to make your work better and try again. Remember, having your work published is wonderful, but it is not the only thing. Being able to create a graphic novel is an accomplishment that will delight the people you love. Talk about it with your brother or sister. Read it to your grandfather. Find your audience.

Some final words

Writing a graphic novel places you out front with other creative people who enjoy the challenge of this newer way of storytelling. If you use a computer to craft your work, rapid changes in technology will bring even more choices in the future. The big picture about graphic novels is expanding right before your eyes!

Read! Write!

And enjoy all the exciting challenges and changes in your life.

CASE STUDY

Gene Yang first published *American Born Chinese* as a series of mini comics and on the Web.



CHAPTER 10: FIND OUT MORE

Glossary

cliff-hangers—nail-biting moments that end a chapter or scene of a story

dramatic irony—when the reader knows something the characters do not

edit—to remove all unnecessary words from your story, correct errors, and rewrite the text until the story is the best it can be

editor—person at a publishing house who finds new books to publish and advises authors on how to improve their stories by telling them what needs to be added, cut, or rewritten

first-person viewpoint—viewpoint that allows a single character to tell the story as if he or she had written it; readers feel as if that character is talking directly to them

foreshadowing—dropping hints of coming events or dangers that are essential to the outcome of the story

manuscript—book or article typed or written by hand

metaphor—figure of speech that paints a word picture; calling a man “a mouse” is a metaphor from which we learn in one word that the man is timid or weak, not that he is actually a mouse

motive—reason a character does something

narrative—telling of a story

narrative boxes—small rectangles containing the descriptions of events or scenes inside panels of a graphic novel

omniscient viewpoint—viewpoint of an all-knowing narrator who can describe all the characters and tell readers how they are acting and feeling

panels—box-shaped sections of a page of a graphic novel; most pages contain one to nine panels

plot—sequence of events that drive a story forward; the problems that the hero must resolve

point of view—eyes through which a story is told





prequel—an account of events that occur to characters before they appear in an existing story

publisher—person or company that pays for an author's manuscript to be printed as a book and that distributes and sells that book

sequel—a story that carries an existing one forward

simile—saying something is like something else; a word picture, such as “clouds like frayed lace”

synopsis—short summary that describes what a story is about and introduces the main characters

third-person viewpoint—viewpoint that describes the events of the story through a single character's eyes

unsolicited submission—manuscripts that are sent to publishers without being requested; these submissions usually end up in a “slush pile,” where they may wait a long time to be read

writer's block—when writers think they can no longer write or have used up all their ideas

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information

Visit your local libraries and make friends with the librarians. They can direct you to useful sources of information, including magazines that publish young people's short fiction. You can learn your craft and read great stories at the same time.

Librarians will also know whether any authors are scheduled to speak in your area. Many authors visit schools and offer writing workshops. Ask your teacher to invite an author to speak at your school.

On the Web

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Read more graphic novels

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